



CAMBRIDGE PHILATELIC SOCIETY

## Appendix to CPS Newsletter Issue 88

---

### BRITISH STAMPS AND POSTAL HISTORY OF THE 20TH CENTURY FROM THE VIEWPOINT OF THE POSTMASTERS GENERAL

Cambridge Philatelic Society; President's display, 2 September 2015.

When selecting a subject for my presidential display in 2015, I wanted to show the Cambridge Philatelic Society something which I had not shown before. Many of you are philatelists more than postal historians and I thought a subject bringing the two subjects together would satisfy a broader audience. British 20th century stamps are familiar to most collectors, so I thought that looking at these from a different perspective would be beneficial. I tried to veer away from simply using the basic stamps, making use of essays, overprints, especially those of the Post Office Training School, dummy stamps and Cinderella material. Using the politically oriented Postmasters General as a viewpoint allowed me to use Social Philately. Much non-philatelic material helps to demonstrate the major changes in the Post Office through time using such original pieces as Punch cartoons and especially signed letters and documents emanating from the PMG's office, both in peace and war. Thus I was able to demonstrate developing technologies especially in electronic communications as well as the more traditional philatelic stamps and envelopes.

The display covers 36 Postmasters General from the Duke of Norfolk (Unionist) at the turn of the century up to the last incumbent, John Stonehouse (Conservative), when the position was replaced by the Minister for Post and Telecommunications in 1969. They came from many backgrounds, some such as Ness Edwards, Wilfred Paling and Roy Mason started in the coal mines rising through the ranks to become senior Labour party members; Ernest Marples had a similar Labour oriented start, but was Conservative by the time he reached the Post Office. Clement Attlee (Labour) and Neville Chamberlain (Liberal) spent brief careers in the Post Office as a stepping stones before rising to be Prime Ministers. Neville's brother, Austen Chamberlain went on to receive the Nobel Peace Prize for his work towards the Treaty of Locarno. Some PMGs were already titled when they took office, such as the Marquess of Londonderry (Conservative), the Earl of Derby (Conservative), Earl de La Warr (Labour) and Viscount Stansgate, more familiar as Labour's Tony Benn

At the dawn of the 20th century, the Duke of Norfolk with beard rampant was Unionist PMG (1895-1900) under Prime Minister Lord Salisbury, when Queen Victoria was still on the throne and De La Rue's Jubilee Issue stamps carried British mails to every curve of the globe. The Marquess of Londonderry (Conservative PMG 1900-02) was in office when the Queen died, and he saw the transition to the Edwardian era, with fairly minimal changes to the stamps with the new Emil Fuchs head of Edward VII. Issued designs on buff paper were shown with Boer War protest labels mimicking the new Edward definitives. Bradbury Wilkinson essays demonstrated a more pictorial definitive which showed a battleship. Although never issued, an Edwardian £5 orange was featured





as part of the set on an Ottmar Zieher post card. Later Londonderry carried the Sword of State at George V's coronation, an event only celebrated on Cinderella stamps. Sidney Buxton (Liberal PMG 1905-10) saw the introduction of Penny Postage to the USA and the acquisition of Marconi telegraphic stations by the GPO. The failure of the early George V issues under Herbert Samuel (Conservative PMG 1910-14, 1915-16) was marked by a political cartoon of a starved lion and Punch's Irish Edmondus Rex proposal, as well as a printing flaw on an issued stamp in which the monarch appears to have had something nasty thrown in his eye. The production of the Ideal Stamp was shown as stamps, being printed under the gaze of the PMG and illustrated on post card. 1911 saw the Coronation Air Mails. Various essays and issues were shown including a Printex essay by Perkins Bacon, Admiral's Head types of Waterlow & Sons, the Peace & Commerce designs and a set of SPECIMEN (2/6-£1) overprinted Waterlow Sea Horse high values; low values were represented by the 1924 issue with Post Office Training School bars. The First World War demanded massive developments in the Military mail handling, including air mails, and in telephone communications.

Vernon Hartshorn's (Labour PMG 1924) short term saw the 1924 Empire Exhibition with introduction of the first British Commemorative adhesive postage stamps. Sir William Mitchell-Thomson (Conservative PMG 1924-29) saw the issue of the second British commemorative stamp issues for the British Empire Exhibitions at Wembley in 1925. The 9th Universal Postal Union Congress was held in London in 1929, when a further issue of stamps included the famous £1 design by Harold Nelson. The congress approved Postage Paid Franking and regulation of Airmails. Hastings Lees-Smith (Labour PMG 1929-31) was charged with brightening up post Offices which did not really take form until Sir Kingsley Wood (Conservative PMG 1931-1935) took office as illustrated by Punch as was his development of air mails. Massive increase in use of the GPO Telephones was encouraged by a number of Telephone themed cancellations of stamps on the mails. 1934 saw the introduction of Photogravure into British stamp printing by Harrison & Sons. In 1935 George V celebrated his Silver Jubilee. In Brighton the Dutch Transorma letter sorting machine was installed, having been first displayed at the 1924 Wembley Exhibition.

George Tryon's (Conservative PMG 1935-40) stamp producing policy was put to the test in 1936 with the three kings: the death of George V, succession and abdication of Edward VIII and accession of George VI. Finally there was the 2nd World War. But the Post Office success was marked by a Punch cartoon of Ernest Shepherd with a letter box reporting to John Bull that the Belgian ambassador had said that he British G.P.O. was the envy and admiration of the world. Original Press photographs show Tryon inaugurating a new articulated Mobile Post Office in 1936. A photographic essay for the Edward VIII issue was shown signed by the 15 year old designer, Hubert Brown, who only received credit from the GPO for his used design after public outcry. George VI issued definitives were represented by Training School overprints, War Tax, essays by Thomas Todd and Hugh Vallency, and Goebbels' propaganda essays produced in the





Oranien-Sachsenhausen Concentration Camp, including 'Liquidation of Empire' overprints. William Morrison (Conservative PMG 1940-42) took over briefly War-torn Britain. The Penny Postage Centenary celebrations were somewhat curtailed and a press photograph of Morrison was shown opening a wartime tented Post Office for use in blitzed London in 1941. The Channel Islands became lost to Germany. For the rest of the war Harry Crookshank (Conservative PMG 1942-45) was in charge with great responsibility for rapidly changing mail routes.

The Earl of Listowel (PMG 1945-47) took over in the post-War austerity years celebrating with the Peace and Reconstruction issue of 1946, and going on as Secretary of State to India, assisting Mountbatten preparing India and Pakistan for independence. Wilfred Paling (Labour PMG 1947-50) brightened up the austerity years with the commemorative issues for Silver Wedding, Channel Islands liberation and Olympic Games in 1948. Ness Edwards (Labour PMG 1950-51) had signed a Harrison & Sons presentation card 'Printed in Photogravure for the Postmaster General' card showing the Festival commemoratives of 1951. The short-lived new coloured low value definitives and the horizontal format Festival high values were shown with Post Office Training School overprints. A prize winning £1 essay for the Stamp Mirror Design Competition, by A.T. Derbyshire was shown.

George VI died in 1952 and Earl De La Warr (Labour PMG 1951-55) appointed by Churchill, published a special edition of the Post Office Circular, announcing that condolences had been sent to the new Queen Elizabeth. A press photograph showed him removing the Union Jack from a Post Office van revealing the Royal Mail Crown E2R logo for the new reign. He saw the introduction of the Wilding definitives and saw considerable technological advances in Telex, letter sorting, trans-Atlantic cable and the introduction of commercial television.

Charles Hill (Conservative PMG 1955-57) a former Secretary of the British Medical Association, became a household name as the 'Radio Doctor' during WW II. He was shown in press photographs opening a new Commer Mobile Post Office in 1956 and on the dust cover of his autobiography 'Over the Hill' published in 1964.

Ernest Marples (PMG 1957-59) was initially Labour oriented, but became a Conservative serving the Post Office under Harold Macmillan, introducing Subscriber Trunk Dialling in telephones and Postcodes which first appeared in Norwich. The introduction of graphite lined stamp and phosphor banding introduced a new phase in technological sorting and handling of mails in the Post Office. Marples went on to be Minister for Transport and became Baron Marples of Wallasey, but his building interests brought him into conflict with his ministerial responsibilities and he removed to Monaco as a tax exile, only returning to England to be buried.

Reginald Bevins (Conservative PMG 1959-64) was initially a Labour councillor, and became private Secretary to Harold Macmillan. He was a firm supporter of commercial television, but his position was marred by the Great Train robbery of 1963 and demands





for an increase in Post Office worker's pay in 1964. A signed letter from him accompanies a 7th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference first day cover addressed to the Postmaster General of Rhodesia and Nyasaland, the Hon. W. Davidson. His crowned official cachet in purple adorns a cover of 1963.

With the return to a Labour Government under Harold Wilson, the young maverick Anthony Wedgwood Benn (Labour PMG 1964-66) entered the Post Office. Later, shunning his heritage, Viscount Stansgate renounced his title and became just Tony Benn as many signed first day covers will attest to, including mine of the Post Office Tower. With the help of the Queen he opened the Post Office Tower in 1965. Despite attempts to remove her head from British postage stamps, in which he failed, Benn encouraged much refreshing change in commemorative stamp design, and managed to get the queen's head reduced to a simple gold-printed outline. A press photograph shows Benn introducing a Trim-Phone in 1965. Subsequently, in post-Postmaster General times, Benn became the last Minister for Posts and Telecommunications (April-May 1974) after which the Post Office came under the Secretary of State for Industry, also under Benn (1974-1975).

Edward Short (Labour PMG 1966-68) saw the introduction of the long-lived Machin Issue and clamped down on the Pirate Radios. He became deputy leader of the party in 1972. He became Life peer as Lord Glenamara of Glenridding and served as chairman of Cable & Wireless.

Roy Mason (Labour PMG 1968) was only in the Post Office from July to October 1968, seeing in only the British Paintings commemorative issue of 12 August. Finally John Stonehouse (Labour PMG 1968-69) introduced two tier postage rates in 1968, as commemorated in the satirical envelopes designed by Jon Baker. A press photograph shows Stonehouse with stamp designer David Gentleman and the Investiture issue of 1969, and a signed first day cover of the event bears his signature. Stonehouse was the last British Postmaster General when the office closed with the Post Office Technology issue of 1 October 1969 of which I have his signature on a First Day Cover. He immediately became the Minister for Post and Telecommunications which immediately took over the responsibility for the Post Office. His latter career crumbled into failure involving serious fraud and faking his own death.

Most unfortunately I was struck down with 'flu just before the critical day for this display and I thank Peter Morton for taking the prepared collection and presenting it on my behalf.